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POEMS

BY

JOHN COWPER POWYS

"Give me to drink Mandragora —"
Antony and Cleopatra.

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DEDICATED

TO

MARIAN POWYS

Oh lace-maker, what joys, what fears
  Do you weave into your thread?
What sorcery from the far-off years
  Hovers above your head?
Your flickering fingers are dipped deep
  In the magic-flowing stream.
Is there a sleep beneath this sleep
  And a dream beyond this dream?

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THE FLUTE-PLAYER

ONCE I saw her. 'Twas long ago;
From the bridge of a dream-city.
Drops of rain were falling slow.
It was autumn and long ago;
And somewhere in the fields below
A flute-player played this ditty —
  One look and never the same again
  Are the roses on the wall;
  One look and forever the midnight rain
  With a different sound must fall.

Gables and gardens, roofs and towers,
Hung vague and rich and dim.
From somewhere there came a scent of flowers,
And a wind from the world's rim;
And the sun sank red behind the towers,
And she stood and looked at him.

She looked at him from a closed window,
Then at me did she look down.

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It was autumn and very long ago,
And drops of rain kept falling slow
And a flute-player played on his flute below,
From the fields below the town.

And now they have told me so constantly
That the place was a city of dreams,
That my reason believes it; but in my heart,
In my heart most real it seems!
And thro' town and country I still must go
The shadowy roads along,
Seeing always that closed window
And hearing that flute-player's song.

And when the sun most rich and dim
Sinks down behind dark towers,
And there comes a wind from the world's rim
And from somewhere a scent of flowers —
I stand again on the bridge of that city
And hear that flute-player;
And my Love looks down on me in pity,
And I look back at her.

— One look and never the same again
Are the roses on the wall;
One look and forever the midnight rain
With a different sound must fall!

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THE CUP

AH, be satisfied, my dear;
There is none but you
Who can hold me from the fair,
Brimming, glimmering, lovely, rare
Cup of exquisite despair,
Cup of black basalt —
  Salter than the sea is salt,
  Older than the sea is old,
  Fuller than the sea is full!
I have cried, "How beautiful
Is that cup!" have wept and cried,
"It is full of heavenly dew!"
  Ah, my dear, be satisfied;
  There is none but you.

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THE VIGIL

LET the huge stars roll on!
My vigil's kept.
Love lies his grave upon —
What is there left?
I swore to guard the shrine
Where the bright candles shine.
Bread is bread, wine is wine.
Darkness on all be poured!
The altar has no God.

Let the huge stars roll on
Space beyond space!
Love was; and love is gone.
Cover his face!
Let the great gulfs abhorred
Take it, my flaming sword,
Deep below deep!
Hail, thou that wast my Lord,
I have kept watch and ward —
Now I can sleep.

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HER LOVE

I TOOK the love you threw away
When the moon was full;
When in the river the full moon lay
And the river-reeds were hushed in their play
And gave their souls to the moon,
And whispered and cried, "Ah, well-away!
Today must turn into yesterday
And the moon must wither and fade away,
The beautiful full moon!"

I took the love that you had scorned,
Where it lay in that cold reed-bed,
Took it when the morning dawned,
Making the river red.
"Behold, in spite of her bitter scorn,
In spite of the blood spilt by the dawn,
That love is mine," I said.

And now when the moon is old
And the sun, all burning gold,
Scorches the city street;
Now when the river is dried
And the reeds have drooped and died,
Your love is a fountain sweet;

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A fountain and a cup!
  And the wretchedest and the worst
Bless God as they drink it up,
  For it quenches their deepest thirst.
And the air of the hottest day
  Grows cool and beautiful,
Because of the love you threw away
  When the moon was full.

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WAYFARERS

THE wind is very cold!
Does it blow from the ultimate sea,
Or over cities sad and old,
Lost beyond memory?"
So cried my heart to my soul,
As it shivered by its side;
But "Follow the wind — follow the wind!"
My soul replied.

And the wind led them on and on,
Till they came to the city of Dis;
"Here shall we rest!" my poor heart cried,
"Here shall we find our bliss;
Behold, this is great Babylon!
The Heart's Desire is this!"
And it blessed itself and blessed my soul
With a wicked heathen kiss.
So cried my heart to my soul,
As it shivered by its side,
But "Follow the wind — follow the wind!"
My soul replied.

And the wind led them on and on,
Till they came to the city of God.
"Here shall we rest!" my poor heart cried,
And tears of blood it poured.
"On these streets shine the sun and the moon:
The City of God is this!"

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And it blessed itself and blessed my soul
With a most holy kiss.
So cried my heart to my soul,
As it shivered by its side.
But "Follow the wind — follow the wind!"
My soul replied.

And the wind led them on and on
Till they came to the City of Dreams,
To the place where the king called "Might-have-been"
Dwelleth with "Never-to-be," his queen,
And all is as it seems.
"Here shall we rest!" my poor heart cried,
"The City of Dreams is this."
And it blessed itself and blessed my soul
With a wistful and weeping kiss.
So cried my heart to my soul,
As it shivered by its side.
But "Follow the wind — follow the wind!"
My soul replied.

And still they follow and follow,
Beyond each ultimate shore;
And Aldebaran shines behind them
And Arcturus shines before.
And when my poor heart murmurs,
"When we left those gates we sinned!"
My soul thro' the darkness answers her —
"Follow the wind!"

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EPISODE

SO now that all is over,
And it does not greatly matter
How long the same roof cover
The hope that perished there,
The fleeting hour to flatter.
Now that it all is over,
Forget the sad word lover,
And breathe — the air, the air!

Lean down and watch the river
Flow fast beneath our bridge;
Watch the faint grasses quiver
On the familiar ridge.
If all were well there would be
No difference in the dew,
Nor in different fashion could we
Catch the horizon's clue.

A sign, a symbol captured
From the eternal flow!
Stood we by love enraptured,
What more could either know?
Nothing! Between us ever
The old unfathomed sea,
Not less than now would shiver
With its bitter mystery.

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So now that all is over,
Let the great stars emerge,
Placid and calm, and cover
The sky from verge to verge!
The deep and flowing magic
Of the universe is such,
Comic be it, or tragic,
It does not matter much!

INVOCATION

WHO will waken the wind for me?
Who will waken the wind?
The night is loaded with misery;
And like one stricken with leprosy
The moon has sunk in the sea.
The earth is heavy as if it had sinned;
Like a ghost stands every tree.
Who will waken the wind for me?
Who will waken the wind?

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THE WRITER

IN the shade of the pyramids
I knelt and wrote on the sand,
While with softly drooping, veiléd lids,
You watched in the shade of those pyramids
The movements of my hand.

I wrote of the fall of Troy,
I wrote of the Grecian ships,
I wrote of Adonis the lovely boy,
And of wingéd Psyche's virgin joy
As she clung to Eros' lips.

I wrote of the Syrian pearls,
Of Herod, the Jewish king.
I wrote of Salome's tossing curls
And the pale lips sweeter than any girl's,
Of her blood-stained offering.

But all the while you kept,
Dark-lowered your veiléd lids.
You neither laughed nor murmured nor wept;
A watcher would surely have dreamed you slept
In the shade of those pyramids.

But when I wrote in the sand
A little unlegended name,
A human unhistoried name,
With a bitter cry and uplifted hand
You rose and over that famished land,
Fled away like a flame.

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BLASPHEMY

O FAIRY form, O flower-like face,
O piteous tender breast,
Why did you come with your childish grace
And trouble my heart's rest?

The tide, my darling, is bitter and deep
That washes that cruel shore.
The happy lovers are those that sleep
And love not any more.

Calm filmy dreams thro' each tired head
Flow softly, mingle and flow.
The happy lovers are those that are dead,
That died full long ago.

O child, forgive me; I lie, I lie
With an evil blasphemy!
I lie to the clouds in the air above!
I lie to the earth and the sea!

The living, the living must worship love!
The dead, the dead must be.

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THE FLOWER

I COULD not see at that hour,
I tell you, I could not see!
The face of the night was wet
And there was rain on the wind.
Oh, misery — oh, regret!
Blind! Blind! Blind! Blind!
I tell you, I could not see.
There was too much rain on the wind
When I stooped and picked that flower.

I hold it now in my hand,
As the moon thro' the branches peers,
Wickedly, wantonly peers.
But now it is too late,
And its petals desolate
Droop and lose their power,
And I see that this murdered flower
Would have changed the course of my fate.

And now, oh wanton moon,
As you flicker thro' boughs where the rains
Drip to a fitful tune,
I see on that flower the veins
Of a delicate-pencilled rune,
A hope that no longer remains.

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Oh moon! if only it grew
  Still living, still tender and free,
Oh wanton moon, I would laugh at you;
  Nor bitterly wander the forest thro',
While the rain drips sadly from tree to tree,
  Cursing the cause of my misery,
  The blindness—the blindness—that ruined me!

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VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS

MY strength is shifting sand; the waters
Of jealousy meet over my head;
I am scorned and scourged by Satan's daughters;
And crucified on a salt sea bed.
I have prayed to the gods. Oh, little the use!
Thou, greater than God, descend on me.
Thou breath of the deep world, set me free.
Blow from your primal eternity.
Veni Creator Spiritus!

My strength is trodden dust. The claw
Of envy tears me day and night,
And the tawny lion of "Nevermore"
Eats my heart for his delight.
Oh, calm cool breath, your floodgates loose!
Oh, breath of the deep world, set me free.
Oh, greater than God, descend on me.
Blow from your primal eternity.
Veni Creator Spiritus!

My strength is the dregs of poured-out wine.
The dry ground drinks me. The poison-flower
Grows fat with me. The root malign
Of the night-shade waits its baleful hour.
Life is too bitter. "I could not choose
But weep to see another thus."
O breath from beyond the land and sea,
O calm and cool eternity.
Veni Creator Spiritus!

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My strength is smouldering ashes. The molten
stream
Of love consumes me; all day and night I waste
Burning from fever-dream to fever-dream,
My parchéd mouth full of the dead-sea taste.
O air, O breath, give what the gods refuse!
O depths beyond all depths, have pity on me!
O space beyond all spaces, set me free.
Blow from your calm and cool eternity.
Veni Creator Spiritus!

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THE BLOOD

I FOUND bright drops of purple blood
Beside a dying faun.
A mushroom-cup had caught that flood
From the brown body torn.

I took the blood and went apart
With her whose love I killed.
"Take this and fill with it your heart,
In place of what I spilled!"

She looked at me out of her pain —
Sweet saints, on my death-bed
Let me not see that look again!
Then lightly, lightly she said —

"I take that blood. When we shall meet,"
And she gave me her mouth to kiss —
"At the White Christ's golden judgment seat,
I will lie to him of this.

"I will lie to him, the great White Christ,
About the love you killed.
I will say the brown faun's blood sufficed
In place of what you spilled."

Softly she turned and left me there,
And I was left alone;

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And her voice came faintly upon the air,
"A faun's blood shall atone!"

But from where she left me I did not move,
And never yet have moved.
For I am he that murdered love,
And yet am I not loved?

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THE WIND

THE night is sobbing and crying with rain,
And the wind is drifting among the trees;
Drifting and whispering to me again
Of the memories — of the memories!

Like a phantom sea is the drifting wind;
Flowing towards us, ebbing apart;
The merciless wind without a heart!
Like a phantom sea is the drifting wind.

And my memories tear me away from you;
And your memories tear you away from me;
While the wind goes wailing between us two,
The drifting wind, like a phantom sea.

Oh hollow spaces, oh midnight springs!
Oh deep night-valleys wet with the rain!
Lure, lure this wind to fold up its wings
And bury our memories again!

Then I would forget, and you would forget;
And beneath the sleeping wind
We would pray to the darkness, and watch regret
Drift away o'er the pastures wet,
Till silence healed our mind.

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ESCAPE

DEEP pools there are, pools quiet and still,
Far off, where none of them guess;
Beyond the peaks of the world's last hill
And the desert's loneliness.
But all about the edge of those pools
Flutter like troubled birds,
The little gestures you used to use,
And your light, forgotten words.
And when the moon from the purple sky
Makes signs to the silent grass,
Those pools grow charged with your memory,
And I see your image pass.
I see you not as you really are,
But pale as the lately dead,
With a faint marsh-flame like a fallen star
Flickering above your head.
O wild white cheeks, O scarlet mouth!
Is my heart's deep whisper true
That beyond the peaks of the world's last hill,
I can flee the human race at my will
And yet cannot escape from you?

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THE OLD CRY

IF only ages ago
I had buried my restless heart
Under mountains of snow
In a lonely place apart,
I could bring it now to her,
Locked with a silver key;
And its shadowy pearls would never stir
From that sweet sanctuary.

Oh wind that wafted my boat
To the isles where the Sirens sing,
Somewhere — washed up upon sands remote —
Those pearls lie glittering.
Gather them, gather them up,
Oh wind, and bring them to me
In a misty foam-wreathed cup —
The pearls that I lost in the sea.

Dim with the salt are they,
Blurred and bleached with the sun;
But, gathered from far away,
Bring them back, every one;
That lain once more at rest
Where her heart beats and feels,
They may sleep forever against her breast,
Sealed with a thousand seals!

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WAITING

THE flowerless weeds along the tangled hedge
Listen and wait.
The willow-bushes by the water's edge
Listen and wait.
Under the earth I feel the roots of trees
Listening, waiting.
Oh Earth, oh Sky, oh secret hope of these!
Is it worth waiting?

So sinks my heart's faint whisper hopelessly,
Sinks and is gone;
While the round earth sweeps weeds and willows and me
Carelessly on;
And morning becomes noon, noon becomes night
In the same doubt.
No answer, not a word; till one by one
The stars come out.

And then — but not from them, for they too wait,
Ah, they wait too, the stars! — but from the night,
The night itself, oldest of all the gods,
The answer!
And all the flowerless weeds and the willows and I
Listen — hear nothing — yet are satisfied.
Portions of that Night we know ourselves to be;
Children of the oldest of all the gods are we,
And from ourselves we hide our own hearts' mystery!

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A FACE

IF I could only pass
Into that ultimate later time
Where the solemn planets cease to climb,
And one unruffled sea of glass
Breaks on the sand with monotonous fall,
Calls to the land with continuous call,
Breaks and ebbs and flows and drifts,
While its endless motion lifts
The grey-cold tops of unearthly reeds
And marge to desolate marge succeeds,
With never the trunk of a single tree;
If I could only see
The face of the wind in that ultimate place,
I think it would be less heavy with dreams,
Less heavy with dreams of sea-weeds drifting,
Less heavy with dreams of reed-tops lifting,
Than the human face of one I know!
If I could only go
Into that passionless later time
Where long sea-memories rock like rhyme,
And the sun and moon forever set,
Tinge all with eternal violet,
The face of the wind in that ultimate spot
Where all is equal and nothing forgot,
Would have the look of a face I know
Or dreamed long ago that I know —
Heavy with joy — heavy with woe!

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THE SEA-BIRD

YOU saw my heart as it lay
  Like a hushed rock-pool, aside
From the ocean's wind-tossed spray,
  And you were hurt in your pride.

And the wild sea-bird in you
  Rose and spread out its wings,
And flapping down over cliff and ledge,
Lighted upon that rock-pool's edge
  And troubled it thro' and thro'.

And now that its depths are dim
  And heavy and blurred and blind,
Over the purple waves you skim
And bathe in the sun and make sport for him,
  And give yourself to the wind.

A flashing meteor of pearl,
  You laugh and waver and dart —
In silver circles you gleam and whirl,
A rainbow, a sea-bird, a demon — a girl
  Who has flown across a heart.

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AT THE END OF THE WORLD

THE patient earth, the breathless trees,
Have listened here for centuries,
Have listened under the silver moon
To this little streamlet's flowing,
Hearing nothing in its going
Save its own enchanted tune.

Oh, how silent on moss and stone
Sleeps the whole world's bitter wrong!
While the shadow of love, lying alone,
Listens to the streamlet's song.

At the end of the world this place might be!
So hushed are the shadows, so hushed the grass;
So hushed are the hemlocks of mystery,
Waiting for feet that never pass!

Listen! A voice out of the night!
A voice from the silence — a passionate cry —
Beautiful, terrible, infinite!
The voice of a god who comes to die.

And the patient earth and the breathless trees
Turn to that voice; and the listening air
Yearns to it, thro' the immensities,
As tho' God Himself were dying there.

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Only the little streamlet flows
  Beneath the hemlocks, beneath the moon;
Hearing nothing as it goes,
  Save its own enchanted tune.

And silent, silent, on moss and stone,
  Sleeps the whole world's bitter wrong;
While the shadow of love, lying alone,
  Listens to the streamlet's song.

NIGHT

ALONE again! And the silence flows
  Round the windows of this place.
The night is starless and heavy and close,
Rain-scented like a drooping rose;
And on the night floats your face.

It does not smile, it does not frown,
It does not laugh, it does not weep;
It only rocks itself up and down,
Floating, as if on the waves of sleep.

Like a drooping rose is your dreamy face
With the starless night about it furled;
And infinite silence fills the place,
And there is nothing else in the world.

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THE DAUGHTER OF THE SPHINX

MY mind is a plain with blackened stalks
And the crumbling stones of a buried city,
Where hooded desolation walks,
And all alone in an empty sky
A solitary kite sails by.
But yet, because of the sudden pity
Of the youngest daughter of the sphinx,
Great Ammon on my burden winks
And I have found — ah, none too soon!
A little pallid petalled flower,
Hid in the dust of a fallen tower,
With a phantom lustre like the moon;
And now I can watch the kite sail by,
And the long, long shadows among the stones,
And the blackened stalks and the empty sky,
And the wind-blown dust of ancient bones,
With strange exultant serenity,
And across that plain which is my soul,
Soft incense-clouds of healing roll
With balm, and the breath of a whispered spell,
And an opiate-rain ineffable,
For on him whose mind is scarréd deep,
With secrets sad as the dead who sleep,
On him whose soul is a buried city,
The daughter of the sphinx has pity.

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THE LITTLE FLAME

TRAMPLE it fiercely down,
It will not burn your feet.
The little flame that your savage frown
Hated as it went up and down,
Because it had no heat.

Trample it in the dust!
It only carries in it
The far horizon of one hope,
One faith, one trust, one horoscope,
Cast by one fatal minute.

Press your heel hard on it there,
You know it cannot burn.
It can only answer a hurt life's prayer,
With an ecstasy delicate as air,
That you have yet to learn.

Look! It still licks the ground.
Out with it! Turn it to clay!
The wind will blow with its ancient sound,
When that flame is buried underground
And you have gone your way.

No, it never had heat,
Love sometimes shows that lack!
But you — you have spurned beneath your feet,
What one day, weary of wine and meat,
In vain you'll summon back.

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A pale flame, after your fierce sunsets!
  Yet the Spring came at its call,
Bringing windflowers and pansies and violets,
  And the rosemary that has no regrets
And lasts the longest of all.

Pray, child, to the gods that when you've found
  What the heats of passion prove.
You sob not aloud with a piteous sound,
  Over the plot of trampled ground,
Wherein you murdered love.

THE RIVER

THE pallid river of regret,
  Flows thro' that empty land;
The land you call my heart, where yet
  The poplar-trees of memory, wet
With ancient sorrow, stand.
  And mournfully, mournfully evermore
Thro' those trees the wind goes wailing.
  And like wreckage strewn on a lonely shore,
Where no man dwells and nevermore
  Shall any ship come sailing.
The dead leaves lie where they have fallen,
  Lie on the land where they have fallen,
The land where the roots of sorrow are set,
The land of the river of regret.

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AVE MARIA

HOLLOW spaces, large and deep,
Flow around your quiet sleep.
One would think your dreaming head
Had eternity for its bed!
Oh, how green, for all the night,
Is the floating liquid air,
Full of whispers, full of light,
Vague earth murmurs everywhere!

Listen! Did you hear that sound
In your eyelid-drooping sleep,
Falling thro' the listening night,
Falling, falling? And the earth
Melts in vaporous mist before it,
Melts as if from very birth
It had watched and waited for it!
Listen!

'Tis a petal from the moon
From that cold and chaste moon-flower,
Flung in languid lotus hour,
Like a thought after a tune;
Like a tune after a thought,
Sweet with ecstasy unsought!
And all other lovely things.
Such as shadow-veined moth-wings,
Such as shells from drifting seas,
Such as wild anemones,

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Float with it thro' hollow space,
Dark against your white, white face,
Float and flutter and waver now,
Pale against your shadowy brow!
Listen!

Ah! You are listening deep and deep,
And you stir at last in your quiet sleep,
Fall the petals of the moon
To their soft eternal tune,
Thro' the green and hollow night,
All transparent tender things
From their cold creative springs
Fall, fall down into the night,
With a tremulous shy delight.
Listen!
Ave Maria!
The heart must be pierced with a sharp sword,
That would be the heart of the mother of God!

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THE RECLUSE

WHY do you live in shadows and sighs,
'Mid waving grasses and faint, faint scents
'Mid floating murmurs and mysteries,
And the ghosts of roses? Arise! Go hence!

"Go hence and wrestle beneath the sun!
Go hence and live before you die!
For laurels, not roses, the race is run,
In the great arena under the sky.

"Go hence! Or my God, the Lord of Hosts,
Will put it into my heart to smite
You and your roses that smell like ghosts
Into the everlasting night!"

"Smite on, dear heart. The eternal night
Will cover me with shadows and sighs;
And, like one great rose, the Infinite
Will hide me forever from your eyes!"

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THE LEAVES

THE first dead leaves of the year are down!
Look, how pale they float,
Under the bridge of the market-town
By wharf and barge and boat!
How cold the rain-drenched meadows lie,
Heavy with mist each one!
And the elm-trees stand how silently
Against the horizon!

Oh, Love, oh, Life, most strange, most blind
Are our days beneath the sun!
A leaf on the water; on the wind
A feather — and all is done.
The market-town still sleeps — Sweet Christ,
How motionless it seems!
As if one night of rain sufficed
To cover it with dreams.

Can it be only yesterday,
On this same bridge I stood,
And watched the red sun sink away
Behind a fairy wood?
The gods protect us all! So soon
Can summer cease? So light
Can they drift, the leaves that played love's tune?
Can the world end in a night?

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IN THE NIGHT

A CRY like a child's cry lost in the rain
Came to me out of the mist.
I rose and answered that cry again,
But it went sobbing over the plain
And died into the mist.

And where it had been came the scent of flowers
Out of a world's distress,
With a moan of gathered thunder-showers
And a gasping loneliness.

And the gods with their faces wet with crying,
The old gods strange and wild,
Swept out upon us across the night,
And — oh mystery, mystery infinite!
The gods and the weeping child and I
Laughed and kissed in ecstasy!

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REQUIEM

WHERE, oh where, should love be laid?
Where the sigh of the heather-bell,
To the wandering wind can tell,
Tell too heavily, tell too well,
How human hearts are made!

Lift him gently from where he lies
So pale now!
With frozen kisses upon his eyes,
And faded petals upon his brow.
Carry him gently far away,
And bury him out of the sight of day,
Where neither sun nor rain
Can trouble him again.
We have killed him and love grown cold
Is better buried under the mould.

Where, oh where, should love be laid,
Where the lost soul of the sea
Moans and weeps perpetually,
Where the cold night cries in vain
For what cannot come again.

Where, oh where, should love be laid?
Where the sigh of the sea-shell,
To the sobbing wind can tell,
Tell too heavily, tell too well,
How cruel-faithless, how cruel-light,
While love lies dying in the night,
Human hearts are made.

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THE TRAITOR

JUDAS am I, or Peter,
Or am I only one
Set by malicious destiny
Between the moon and sun?

Silver upon the land!
Silver upon the sea!
A world of silver in my hand —
And my Love looking at me.

It is not only the Lord,
Who in the high priest's hall,
Looks on the man who can betray,
Till bitterly weeping, he turns away,
Too common grows that word.

Put out the altar-light!
Let no wine redden the floor.
Cover that lovely face from sight!
Let me go forth into the night,
And see that look no more.

Silver upon the land!
Silver upon the sea!
A world of silver in my hand —
And my Love looking at me!

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THE TEARS

WHERE, oh wind, do you carry the tears
That the muffled heads are weeping,
Under the roofs where no one hears,
While the Lord Christ is sleeping?

"Cold he lies in the reeds of the dawn,
But I carry them to him there,
Where far away from the world's scorn
They gleam like dew on his hair.

"The tears that are shed for loneliness
Like pearls on his forehead rest,
And the tears of passionate distress
Are opals on his breast.

"But where, oh wind, are the hopeless tears —
The tears no comfort know —
The tears that none but the midnight hears —
The tears of love's deep woe?

"Tell me, oh wind, ere you depart,
On his white body where are they?"
"Ah! They are in the Lord Christ's heart
And none can take them from him away!"

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SPRING

PAIN and spilt blood and an appalling cry
Turn the earth's air to poison and make bitter
The bread we eat and lay across our sleep
A quivering shadow like a gash that bleeds.
We laugh and are ashamed as those who mock
An open grave.
And yet the wet stalks of the hyacinths
Must soon, amid green spears, bear purple flowers!
And yet, from rain-soaked earth and crumpled leaves,
The yellow primrose, with a sweet swift pang,
Must send Spring's perilous breath, sharp-shuddering
With faint and delicate treachery, thro' our veins!
Shall we henceforth before these hushed wood-things
Stand dazed and shamed? Or shall we in strange mood
Laugh weeping laughter, as those laugh who hear
Infants make holiday upon a grave?
Softly with pungent scent of fields fresh-ploughed
The small soft misty rain through dripping boughs
Washes the crumbling roots of fallen trees;
Red-Campion droops his petals to the earth;
While, wild and clear, from liquid rain-sweet throat,
As though no graves covered the green earth's face,
Bursts, as of old, the blackbird's shameless song.

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A LOOK

I WOULD not stop you on your way;
I would not bind your feet;
Or on your shining forehead lay
One shadow of defeat.
Go forward — if you turn, the crowd
Might trample you with me.
Let the flute-players play more loud
And the dancers dance more free!
But once before the palace gate
Rolls back and I'm bereft —
Turn and look on me; and if fate
Has any pity left,
A passing mist upon your eyes
Will redeem every sacrifice.

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THE HORIZON

PALE trees on the horizon grow,
Pale, faint and dim and grey —
Can they be real trees? They flow
Into the mist away.
Between us the valleys are green and wide,
But what is beyond on the other side?

Beyond I see a wooden pier,
Stretching into a shadowy lake,
And a sudden cry of wild-fowl I hear
As over the reeds their flight they take,
Over the reeds and far away
Beyond the trees, dim, pale and grey;
A wooden pier — a shadowy pond,
But what is beyond? What is beyond?

Beyond there is a long, long road,
Bordered by ditches dark and wide,
Where a wayfarer with a heavy load
Talks to the silence at his side.
Talks to the silence and talks to the trees,
But what is beyond, beyond all these?

Beyond is a house with a ruined wall,
Where the lóng road enters an ancient wood,
And its rafters rot and sink and fall,
And nothing disturbs its solitude,

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Only a heron, high up in the sky,
Cries with a melancholy cry;
  Cries to the house, to the road and the trees,
  Cries to the wayfarer passing these;
Between us the valleys are green and wide,
But what is beyond — on the other side?

Pale trees on the horizon grow,
  Pale, faint and dim and grey,
Can they be real trees? They flow
  Into the mist away!
Beyond and beyond, and further still,
Beyond, till we cross the world's last hill —
So it goes. So it always will!

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DEMETER CONSOLATRIX

TROUBLED heart and fevered forehead —
Ah! with calm immortal hand
Soon the mother of all shall take you
To a green and silent land.
Great red lilies hushed and splendid
Shall be lamps to light your dreams,
And your sleep shall be attended
By the flow of hidden streams.

Large mild stars shall shine above you,
Cool deep grass your bed shall be,
With the mother of all to love you,
You shall lose your misery.
She shall quench your forehead's fire
With her calm immortal hand;
You shall have your heart's desire
In that green and silent land.
From the great red lilies' splendour,
From the large mild stars shall fall
Magic wonderful and tender,
And the mother of all shall give you all!

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THE GOLDEN CUP

LOVELY with memories surging up,
From a fount beneath the years,
This light spring day like a golden cup,
Holds something deeper than tears.

Misty and tender, beneath, above,
The green, green sap flows sweet,
And beyond the mountains waits my Love,
With daisies at her feet.

Is it I, is it I, whom love has found?
No! No! It cannot be!
I have lost my sense for such heavenly sound
And my ear for such harmony.

Who am I that such liquid and tender mist
From the green, green trees should rise?
Who am I to be welcomed and healed and kissed
By the wonder of such skies?

Not unto me, oh, Lord, not unto me,
This lovely and golden day!
Take it and scatter it abroad
Over the land and sea!

Let it float and flicker, this heaven-sent light,
Where the saddest wanderers roam;
Till the healing dews fall with the night,
And the lost return to their home!

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THE POPLAR-LEAVES

WHY do they, all of them, lean one way,
The poplar-leaves of your heart's sad tree?
Why do they shiver and tremble so
When the wild sea-winds have ceased to blow
And the wild sea-swallows have flown away
From the edge of the bitter and lonely sea?
If I call them to me from over the hill —
The other swallows — the swallows that fly
O'er the cool, fresh streams of a clearer sky —
Would those leaves lean the same way still?

Ah! they must all of them lean one way
Whatever wind the other follows,
However swiftly fly the swallows;
For the sea-born can only the sea obey.

But if from the sea itself should blow —
From the sea itself, from the lonely sea,
A strange new wind; then I should know, —
And — perhaps — those leaves would turn to me!

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THE MIST

IN and out of the mist
We waver, ghosts that we are!
And the hands and lips we have kissed
Beckon us from afar:
Beckon us, whisper us, cry to us,
In and out of the mist;
Mock us, elude us, fly from us;
The hands and lips we have kissed.

In and out of the mist, like ghosts
We waver along the shore,
Flickering phantom-hosts,
Lost evermore — evermore!
Whispering, beckoning, sighing,
Weeping, vexing the night,
Nothing can stop our crying,
Except red burning light!

Ghosts in the mist are we,
And ghosts are the planets who peer
And peep at our misery,
With their tender pitiful leer;
But the great vermilion sun
That in one moment's blaze
Could melt, transfigure, and clarify,
And outline against eternity,
Our inmost selves and our troubled days,

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The laughing, careless, reckless sun,
The life-giver, when all is done,
Knowing no weakness or tenderness,
Having no pity for our distress,
Sick to death of our mists and lies,
Pours himself upon other skies.

OPTIMISM

YOU who boast you're an optimist,
May the leprosy of the Jews
Wither your flesh for the truth you've missed
And the cozening lies you use!

One little child, tender and weak,
Hurt by life's devil's-wheel
Should make you blush thro' your bowels sleek,
But you are not worthy to feel.

As long as the smallest one
Of earth's children by pain is riven,
As long as one cry goes up under the sun,
God must not be forgiven!

He does not forgive Himself,
The rain in the night is his prayer,
From the cross, from the cross, he forgives such pelf
As *you* — who hung him there!

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THE APPEAL

OH that at this last hour
The word might be given me
To tell you the power — the power
That you have over me!

Oh that I could enfold
Dyed in purple and blue,
Writ in gold upon gold,
The feeling I have for you!

What can I give to you
To take on your cruel way,
That will cry at your heart all night
And cry at your heart all day!

What can I find for you
To place close to your breast —
Something fatal and true,
Something to trouble your rest?

O, wraith of the rain and the mist,
How can I live without you?
You float on a sea of amethyst
And the moon is silver about you!

You float and drift on a shadowy tide,
And the feathered reeds bend low,

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And the moonlit pastures yearn to your side,
And the forests beckon you.

Each night, each night ere my eyelids fall
I shall feel you calling to me,
With a low persistent plaintive call,
Like a sea-bird lost on the sea!

And I shall answer and you will hear,
And above the wind and rain
The people a strange sobbing will hear;
We shall be together again.

Oh that at this last hour
The word might be given me
To tell you the power — the power
That you have over me!

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GOD

WHAT is that face at the window?
What is that form at the door?
Of white mist are its shadowy limbs
And with moonlight covered o'er.

Is it a girl or a ghost?
Pile up the fuel higher!
Pour out the wine and heat the roast!
Let us warm ourselves at the fire.

Look! It wavers and moans.
It is very cold and drear!
Pelt it with nuts and cherry-stones!
It must not enter here.

Let us talk philosophy,
While the roast is on the spit.
That moonlit thing which wavers there,
What have we to do with it?

Listen! Its white lips move.
Christ! Are you mad that you rise
As if each one saw his buried love
Stand living before his eyes?

I have no love. I lie!
I lie not! — The wine is poured
And the roast is ready; and I —
I refuse to believe in God!

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PERSEPHONE

AT last!
After the dumb sick longing; —
At last!
Filling the ancient urns
With odours and all the air
With a shudder, a laughter, a cry —
On a wind blown over leagues of tremulous grass,
Leagues of transparent grass,
Leagues of a million of grass-blades moist with rain,
Moist with warm rain and fresh from the brown earth —

At last!
The ravished one, the birth-pale one,
The holy one, the wanton one,
The Spring returns!

O, youth of the world!
O, martyred innocents!
Murdered on all these battlefields of ours —
Fields that are wet with something else than rain —
Is it your blood that lends unto our flowers
This quivering beauty that redeemeth pain?
For at last!
The ravished one, the birth-pale one,
The holy one, the wanton one,
The Spring returns!

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THE VISITOR

FORGET? I had forgotten —
Little the use!
A feather in the doorway —
The flood is loose.

Forget? I had forgotten.
No candle burns.
A leaf within the doorway —
The dead returns.

Forget? I had forgotten.
Nail up the door!
You should nail up my heart
If she's to come no more.

WITH FLOWERS IN OUR HANDS

COME let us walk thro' their burning hell
With flowers in our hands!
With flowers in our hands let us walk there,
And see what power that evil air,
That evil air and those burning hours,
Have to hurt us who carry flowers!

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WAR

THESE, these are not the hours
For mention of sweet flowers,
Or for light whispers blown thro' brittle reeds,
The smoke of war's eclipse,
Rolls dark across love's lips,
Cypris is silent while Adonis bleeds.

So be it. It is so.
And yet while come and go
Sun, moon and stars, the old emotions waken
Which, while we breathe, we must
Feel thro' our human dust
Even tho' the pillars of the earth are shaken.

Oh hero hosts struck low,
That a new world may know,
Some rest from power, some escape from pride,
Faint over each dear head,
The shamèd gods must shed
Tears for the cruel pain in which you died.

Never quite as before,
Will spring come to our door —
A red stain lies upon love's tender star.
All born of human race,
Henceforth upon the place,
Where beats the heart must feel an aching scar.

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In Nature's judgment-hall,
The gods are guilty all,
  All who stood by and let these things be done.
New Hope the world may gain,
It is not worth the pain —
  Not worth it! — of one torn and martyred one!

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TO LULU

IT is not only love
That for one another we feel,
But a strange, a strange identity,
Like spokes of the same wheel.

Yes, we have walked together,
With buttercup dust on our shoes,
Thro' the lovely rainy weather
With nothing to win or lose,
And the wild-rose scent of the hedges,
And the wild-thyme scent of the hill,
And the fresh, damp smell of the river sedges
Are with us still.

Can they ever come back again,
Those infinite, mystical hours,
With love dissolved in the rain
And pain asleep in the flowers,
Where the men we met were like men,
On some God-like errand bound,
And the girls we met were — like girls
As the world goes round!

Will they ever come back? Will they ever?
Who can say? But at least they were,
And God himself can never
Of the past make empty air;

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Should one of us die, the other
Will have two souls to keep —
His own and what was his brother
Saved from sleep.

For it is not only love,
That for one another we feel;
But a strange, a strange identity
Like spokes of the same wheel!

THE ORACLE

"THE world is malleable," you said
And like a young god passing by
Who with large gesture carelessly
Raises to life one who is dead.

That royal oracle sets free
The old sweet reckless powers of chance,
And lifts from lovely circumstance
The monolith of destiny.

"The world is malleable" you said,
"And its horizons still are blue."
Oh subtle heart, oh crafty head!
I take the hint and follow you!

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THEY SAY

THEY say the sky is azure fair,
I do not know;
They say the spring is in the air,
It may be so.
They say the crimson-throated shrike
Will nest this year in Alder Dyke —
'Tis very like, 'tis very like.

. . . . . .

The spring? Oh God, in heaven above,
Let the spring go — give me my Love!

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OVER

WITH the blood of my heart on my hand
As the wind goes over the hill,
Very quiet I stand
At your darkened window-sill.

Does the rain that beats on your roof,
Thro' your dreams send not one cry?
In all the world is there no reproof
For your thoughtless cruelty?

Do you see on the shore of dreams
In the misty nebulous land
A bowéd phantom who seems
To carry blood on his hand?

Do you hear as the pale rain drifts
Over yellow poppies and graves,
A desperate pleading that lifts
Its voice above the waves?

The voice of the love that your frown
Has driven from human breath,
Do you hear it wandering up and down
Over the country and over the town,
From the reedy shores of death?

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Rise up, rise up for awhile,
And press your shadowy cheek
Against the window and smile,
I will not beckon or speak.

I will only show you the blood
As a sign, a symbol, a token —
Be happy now in your mood,
The golden bowl is broken.

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THE WILLOW-SEEDS

LOOK! The seeds of a willow-tree,
Falling on grass that must have grown,
In this one spot for a thousand years!
The tossing wind like a gusty sea
Over the elder-bushes blown,
Over the hollow-foliaged elms,
With their orbéd shadows in hemispheres,
What wild, strange thoughts it brings to me
From what deep reluctant realms!

Can Fate itself remember the day
When I wandered here from some sea-shore?
I saw these elder-bushes, I saw
This lonely place — that tree-trunk grey;
I saw the willow-seeds cover the grass —
The grass that has grown for a thousand years!
I saw the hollow-foliaged elms,
And then, as now, from reluctant realms,
Came thoughts that would not pass.

What lives we lead — dear God, what lives!
What a palimpsest of double days,
The Master of our journey gives!
Forever round our casual ways
Strange omens peer, strange portents wink;
And we stand darkly on the brink
Of more than mortal mysteries.

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REVERSION

SOMETHING has kept us apart
And has flowed between us twain —
Yet my heart has always been to your heart
As the earth to the healing rain —
But a shadow of sorrow has wounded your breast
And a far-off fragrance has troubled my rest
And we have been kept apart.

But now all will be well!
The immortal gods have spoken!
Fate moves at last with the long-drawn swell
Of the sea; and the charm is broken.

Out of the magical night,
Full of shadows and whispering streams;
Out of the hollow, holy night
Where fade all passing dreams,
We meet and all is well.

And the eyelids of sorrow, the lips of delight
Are bathed in lethe-drenched moonlight,
In oblivious, infinite moonlight,
In the deep mandragora of the night;
And we meet — and all is well.

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FOR ONCE

THRUST upward your green shoots and drink
the rain
Tulip and daffodil! Not till I die
Shall my heart throb with such a spring again
Or from the wine-press of my ecstasy
Such purple waves flow o'er the city's towers,
Making a sunrise of the midnight seas,
And on far roads, like royal embassies,
Telling the green earth of my happy hours.

Not till I die shall such a spring return,
But memory will return, borne on faint airs,
And from the ashes of its ravished urn
Love will repeat the spring-time of its prayers.
How then will look, 'mid such rememberings
These places, where the prints of ancient pain
Hold me, until, with laughter and with rain,
You come to me, O Spring of all my Springs?

They will be brimmed with tears intolerable,
They will be tender with an infinite light,
They will be sadder than a sunken bell,
They will be sweeter than a lover's night,
They will be exquisite with broken sighs,
And faintly whispered words that catch the breath,
They will be quiet as the wings of death,
That quiver between two eternities.

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Thrust upward your green shoots and drink the sun,
Tulip and daffodil! The leaves shall spread
Their foliage and the punctual seasons run
Their unremitted course till I am dead.
O Memory, Memory, sharp must be your sting
And bitter-sweet; for 'till my dream-tossed world
Into the night from which it rose is hurled,
No more, no more shall I know such a Spring!

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THE SATURNIAN

AH, I must follow it high and low,
Tho' it leave me cold to your human touch!
Some starry sorcery made me so;
And from my birth have I been such.

What is it I follow so secret-lone?
Over the hills and along the sea?
Beauty with every seed is sown,
For you, for them, for me?

Not so, by the gods! Do I not hear
In the night a tender-muffled crying,
Rising, falling, sinking, dying?
Oh, I must follow it thro' the world!

Not so, by the gods! When the dawn-wind stirs,
Rustling over the river-reeds,
Trembling over the wet pastures,
Shall I not follow it, whither it leads?

Oh, wild and sad, oh, wild and sweet,
Is the lonely horn that I always hear,
Blown from the place where all streams meet,
Where all horizons disappear!

The long sea-tides bring home to port,
Their ships by many a moonlit wharf,

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But an ebbing twilight carries my thought
  Beyond every coast it would anchor off.

Like a reef-bell rocking and ringing low,
  Under a grey and rain-swept sky,
The beauty I follow doth come and go,
  And if I found it, I should die.

The wild-bird of my longing sings
  Always in the next hollow,
And always, always it spreads its wings,
  When I cross the hill to follow.

Ah! Once when the burning noon was poured
  On moss and stone and dreaming sod,
I saw the great blue flower that God
  Made for the Son of God.

And do you think I can go content,
  With the beauty we meet with everywhere,
When I have breathed that flower's scent
  And seen it melt into the air?

Oh, I must follow it high and low,
  Though it leave me cold to your human touch,
Some starry sorcery made me so;
  And from my birth have I been such.

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THE HOUR

COME let us take this hour and hold it up
While our stars shine,
Leaving our joy untouched, as in a cup
Of unspilt wine;
Then, though the deluge break and we be driven
Into the grave,
Like gods unto the gods we shall have given
The gift they gave.

OBSEQUIES

INCH by inch — for it takes some time, this thing —
You have killed my love;
Till at last a look, a gesture, an anything
Did fatal prove.
And now, ah now, how desperately you cling
To its dead bier.
As tho' thro' your calm breast passed the same sting
That laid it here!

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ACCUSATION

IF this is what you meant,
Why did you not go by?
I had got used to my lonely place
And amid the shadows had found a face,
A phantom-face 'neath a pallid sky,
A phantom-face 'neath a leaden tent —
Why did you not go by,
If this is what you meant?

Why did you not pass on,
If this is what you meant?
Why did you rise like a dumb moss-rose,
Brooding in somnolent repose,
Just where the moonlight shone,
On the path of my content?
Why did you not pass on,
If this is what you meant?

Why did you not go past,
If this is what you meant?
Why did you fling abroad in the air
A royal ransom of rich despair?
Why with rain were your petals so full
And with dew why were you so beautiful?
The charm that held me fast
Had never then been rent.
Why did you not go past,
If this is what you meant?

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THE MONK

OUT of our Lady's cloister torn,
I swept like a hunted flame,
Over valleys and hills forlorn
To a leafy wood where in shades are born
Mosses without a name.

And there I found — poor monk that I was —
My curse, my fate, my spell —
Lightly she leaped from the leafy grass
With a sigh like a vesper-bell.
And her eyes to me had the strange soft look
Of the "Introibo" signs
In my illumined Missal-book,
Where the "Sursum Corda" begins.

O God! I loved her from my heart;
And a little she loved me!
And day and night she led me apart
Where the flickering sunbeams gleam and dart
In the mid-wood's mystery.

Her childish movements, her broken words,
They were my only beads.
For choir we had the twittering birds,
For candles the moonlit reeds.

O God! I loved her from my heart,
And a little she loved me!

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And to watch her laughter flicker and dart
  And the rose in her cheeks come and depart,
Were the prayers of my breviary.

But alas for the monk from his cloister strayed!
  Cold in that very place
Where the hyacinths grew in leafiest shade
  And my Love's head by my side was laid
I saw our Lady's face.

And all night now and all day too,
  I tremble those twain between;
And I hate the sky for its holy blue
  And the earth for its heathen green.
I have lost my love because of my heaven
  And my heaven because of my love.
Is there no mercy ever given
  To him that two faiths move?

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DESERTED

NONE know her; none remember her.
Cold lies she. Round the place
The wind-blown shadows as they stir
Fall on no human face.
Leagues distant the moon draws the tide
As the moon has always done.
Whom does *she* draw to her dead side?
Not one of us — not one!

The grasses sway beside the door;
The wind shrieks thro' the hedge.
No fire-light thrown across the floor
Reddens the window-ledge.
Gone! All, all gone! save those faint ghosts
Her memories, her pain,
And on the roof the fluttering hosts
Of leaves that fall like rain.

And yet the same sky overhead —
The same moon in the sky!
Surely some token of the dead
Who went so wistfully,
Some sign, some token, lingering on
In earth or air or sea,
Must cry upon the hearts of stone
That can let these things be!

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REMORSE

I WROTE my remorse on a forest-leaf
That the wind might bear it to you;
But the wind cared nothing for my grief
And over your roof it flew.
I wrote my remorse on a leaf for you;
But you never knew.

I wrote my remorse on the glimmering sand
Where your tired feet might stray;
But the sea rose up and covered the land
And carried my words away.
I wrote my remorse on the sand for you;
But you never knew.

I wrote my remorse on the breast
Of the Sphinx with the woman's eyes;
And your name remained — but the rest, the rest
Turned sorcery and lies!
I wrote on the Sphinx's breast for you;
But you never knew.

And now, when you weep o'er the spot
Where, earth in earth, I rot,
Do you read, as the rank-grown grass you pull,
What remorse has a grinning skull?
And do you laugh too and let all go?
I shall never know!

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TO ISADORA DUNCAN

WITH the gesture of a god,
You gave me back my youth;
And a scent of violets
Overflowed the world.
With the gesture of a god,
You gave me back my love,
And tears deeper than tears
Overflowed my heart.
With the gesture of a god,
You trampled on fate,
You lifted up on high
Those that had fallen —
All the oppressed,
All the humiliated,
All the offended;
You lifted them up on high
And they were comforted.
With the gesture of a god,
You wrestled with Demogorgon;
You brought hope back
And freedom and triumph
To those whom the world had crushed.
All of us, sitting in darkness,
Saw a great light.
You danced as dance the morning stars
And the universe was conquered.
You smote the universe in the mouth;
And you saved us —
You — a woman.

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TRAVELLERS

TOO many times have we both been born;
Too far have we voyaged — dear Christ, too far!
Too deep disguises have we both worn,
And the masks of too many an avatar!

I catch on your face the old sad smile
Of our ancient disillusionment,
When the ardent crowd tries to beguile
Your world-old soul to impassionment.

And in a moment I know you again,
And you know me and we mock them all,
As we did of old on the Trojan plain,
As we did of old on the Roman wall.

As we did in Carthage and Syracuse,
As we did in Syria and Cathay,
One look — and in a moment they lose
All hold on us. We have slipped away.

Love? Let them talk of Love! Our bond
Goes deeper. It has been sealed in death.
We have looked on Isis in Trebizond
And in Tyre have worshipped Ashtoreth.

Truth? Let them talk of Truth! We laugh,
Who have seen Eleusis wreath'd in flame
And the high lamps swung o'er the cenotaph
Of Her the immortals must not name.

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Beauty? As tho' breathed not from you
  The very dawn of creation's day,
When the planets with all their retinue
  Leaped forth to meet you on your way!

Our dreams have mingled. The new times bring
  Old snatches of buried memory,
Which trouble us like a whispering,
  Heard at the bottom of the sea.

We have been too far; we have dived too deep,
  Death itself cannot quench the spark.
We know too much of the ways of sleep
  To fear the everlasting dark.

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THE DANCE

DANCE on; we would not touch you,
Nay — let us turn aside,
Lest the shadow of what we've looked on
In our eyes should be descried.
Somewhere at least must fingers
Be clasped to the burning sun;
Somewhere must limbs be music
To the tune the fates have spun;
Somewhere the high immortals
Must have oblations poured;
Somewhere in classic portals,
The gods must be adored;
Somewhere must life be beauty
Though the prophets darken their eyes,
Somewhere must beauty be very truth
Though the planets fall from the skies.
Dance on: heed not our plight;
Dance on: be cruel and free;
Dance like a flame in the night!
Dance like a star on the sea!

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TWILIGHT

OH day of shadows and scents! Oh day of roses!
Roses down-drooping into the dark lane —
Once, ere this indolent twilight ebbs and closes,
Have pity and restore my dead again!

Soon will the moon rise, luminous and tender!
Already on the night her pallor is shed.
O roses, roses, pity me and render
Back for one hour my darling from the dead!

God! How the air is full of shadows and roses!
Shadows and scents and roses fill the lane —
Somewhere — oh listen! — where a river flows is
Music beyond all pleasure and all pain!

Oh large and indolent midsummer-night!
Breaking our hearts with memories that bleed,
Oh night of roses, oh moon-trancèd night,
Have mercy! Give me back the one I need!

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THE TUNE

I PLAYED a crazy tune
To the river-weeds.
I played it to the moon,
And the sad dark reeds.

And the face that for so long
Has vexed me hour by hour
Like the rhyme of a lost song,
Like the scent of a dead flower,

Drew near me; and the cold
Lethean, lamentable
Lilt of my love-song old,
To give me her lips was able!

But I played a note too high
Or I played a note too low —
And the same moon looks down from the sky
And the same waters flow.

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REACTION

OH heart, sink into yourself and rally
The old fierce strength of your lonely mood —
Tho' the train goes whistling thro' the valley,
And the moths go fluttering thro' the wood.

The cold dew rises from field and river,
The night-wind wanders from hill to hill,
The tall June grasses sigh and quiver,
Oh heart, sink into yourself, be still!

Have done with love and its shilly-shally!
Have done with love and its poison-smart!
Oh heart, sink into yourself and rally
The old fierce strength of your lonely mood —
Let the train go whistling thro' the valley
And the moths go fluttering thro' the wood.
Return to your solitude, oh heart!

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SATURN

IT is the place!
No moon, no mist, no sound,
As the oracles had writ,
Only the huge and starry night,
Liquid, cool, and infinite,
Lit with lamps, by the old gods lit,
Floating, floating, over it,
Over the place I have found.

It is the place!
I had known it, in the deep
Full-brimmed cup of flowing sleep,
From which, in the vast silence, I
Had drunk inviolability.

It is the place!
Upon the terrace I step forth
And look to the east and look to the north.
On the north there are water-meadows wide,
With shadowy reeds on every side.
On the east — ah! where can I have seen
Mists and marshes so grey and green?
In no human dream I have known this place.
How slow is the sun to show his face!

Did ever the winds with so indrawn breath
Wait and listen, and listen and wait?
Did ever life come so near to death
And remain so wistful and passionate?

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The silence deepens. The grey cold light,
  Stealing over the pools and the reeds —
Is it only the common dawn? This night
  For more than the morning intercedes.

Oh night, and have I not also prayed?
  Oh dawn, and have I not also cried —
Betrayed! betrayed! betrayed! betrayed! —
  Unto the hollow spaces wide?

It is the place!
And now as the vapours rise,
  And now as the mist recedes,
In his old immortal guise,
  Looking down on the reeds,
Luminous, lovely, silver bright,
  Heaven's antagonist, bearer of light;
Still untouched by passion's stir,
  Loving the earth and laughing at her —
  Son of the Morning, Lucifer!

Then I heard them. From the far
  Ledges of the dawn I heard them.
Every fragile, quivering thing
  Of earth's primal gendering;
Every hidden, trembling, shy
  Child of ancient mystery,
Raised a cry out of the cold
  Shadows of the forests old;
Cold and low and sweet and clear,
  Like a sea-shell held to a sea-god's ear —

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"They have buried him in vain!
  Saturn, Saturn comes again!
He was old. He was weak. He was dolorous,
  And they buried him far away from us.
They planted mountains upon his breast
  And they mocked and said, 'There let him rest!
Let the leaves of aeons of forests dead
  Cover his eyelids, hide his head!
Into a midnight deep as the world,
  Let his old sad, mad heart be hurled!'"
Ah, that cry! From many a pool
  Where are reflected strange dim faces,
Faces tender and sad and cool,
  Under the shadow of leafy places,
Came that voice that still I hear,
  Wild and low and sweet and clear,
Over hushed dew-drenched lawns,
  Where rivers flow from secret dawns;
Over forests faint and dim,
  Where the leaves and the shadows remember him.
"They have buried him in vain!
  Saturn, Saturn comes again!"

Oh tremulous hope! Oh large escape
  From the intolerable oppressors!
Oh bent and bowed, resume your shape
  And dispossess the dispossessors!

Bring back the old and tender things,
  The things that weep, the things that play
By the margins of eternal springs,
  Where twilight is lovelier than day,

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And the white dawn never flows away.
Oh tremulous hope! Oh large escape!
Oh bent and bowed, resume your shape
And disposses the dispossessors!

Can it be true?
Can the weak overcome the strong?
Can forgiveness all things cover?
Can the singer hear the end of his song?
Can the loved return to the lover?

Oh planet silver-scornful, oh planet calm!
Riding the ether alone,
Will this great dawn bring us the longed-for balm
And for all griefs atone?

Still low and sweet the cry comes to my ears —
"They have buried him in vain!" —
But fainter, fainter, comes it, and cold salt tears
Are on my cheek again.

It is the place!
From the high terrace I lean forth
And look to the east and look to the north.
Oh pity! Why does that sweet cry fail?
And why grows Lucifer so pale?
Why do the lovely and tender things
Sink back again to their primal springs?
What wheels are those whose terror draws nigh,
Rolling up the slope of the sky?
Look!

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Must it forever be like this?
Oh Fate! Oh Fate remediless!
Look!

Out of the east with a stream of blood,
With music no man has understood,
With splendour, with power, with terrible joy,
With strength to create and strength to destroy;
Kissing all life with a careless kiss,
Creating pain, creating bliss;
The dead, the dead only, free from him,
Red with blood from rim to rim,
Over the conquered throat of the world
The chariot of the sun is hurled!

And so — it is *not* the place;
And once more I bow my face.
They have *not* buried him in vain!
Saturn will never come again!
They rule — they rule from sky to sky.
Hopeless — hopeless, was that cry!
And yet —
Though the oracles have lied to us,
And the gulfs of space have cried to us,
And every chance has died to us,
Oh Saturn, Oh Lucifer, Oh Christ —
Oh Love —

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THE SHOES

I HAVE a pair of new shoes.
They are nice. They have low heels."
So her letter says, and the brief words bruise
My soul and break deep seals.

It is strange! I have talked with her
Of the wistful tears of things;
Of the earth and the gods and the thoughts that stir
The soul, as a wave-tossed voyager
Is stirred by the touch of wings.

But nothing of all I said
Of the gods and the fatal sky,
And the magical stars that over each head
Go heavy with destiny,
Had half such power to bruise;
Or break such world-deep seals,
As, "I have a pair of new shoes.
They are nice. They have low heels."

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ETERNITY

ETERNITY is a wind-blown husk
And fools run after it;
And when a sand-storm brings the dusk,
They call it the infinite.

On the surface — the surface — is Beauty found,
And the surface of life goes deep;
For where it is lost in the underground,
We sleep — we sleep — we sleep.

There is nothing else but the surface of life,
Nor ever was nor will be!
— Except the sleep that endeth life;
And may that fall gently on me!

Fall gently on me, and ere it fall,
Let me once more pretend
That the one I love the most of all,
Is with me at the end.

Let the wind-blown husk, eternity,
Dance over infinite sand,
So the one I love come once to me,
And give me her little hand!

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THE MASK

WITH treacheries bitter and deep
I have kept my place.
With a mask like the mask of sleep
I have covered my face.

I have smiled while my heart beneath
Was deadly with fate,
And the sword in my jewelled sheath
Was white with my hate.

But now as you lift up your hand,
Light as a flower,
By the word of the wind in the sand
I know it, my hour!

And I drop my mask and let fall
The sheath from my sword —
You shall know me, O my one of all,
As I am before God!

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WHAT WE SAY

YOU have gathered somewhere to you
The softness of pastures cool,
And the tender, ineffable blue
Of the deep leaf-shadowed pool,
Where a lovelier sky than ours
Sinks down between wavering weeds
And the roots of the floating water-flowers
Blend with the roots of the reeds.

You have gathered to you somewhere
The passion of hyacinth-stains,
Where the odorous moss-dark air
Is moist with a thousand rains;
You have formed your virgin flesh
Of the suppliance of crescent moons,
And the tender ferns that enmesh
The shadows of summer noons.

When my days are yours there passes
With primrose-scented showers,
The thought of cool deep grasses
And beds of cuckoo-flowers;
When my nights are yours, my dreams
Are full of the flight of swallows,
Dipping their wings in rushy streams
And shady river-hollows.

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O child, you have made your own
  All lovely and delicate things,
And losing you, I am left alone
  In a place where no bird sings;
In a place where no reeds quiver
  Or tender rain goes by,
Nor clouds nor cooling river
  Soften the arid sky.

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"BE HARD!"

SWEET Christ — our hearts should be stone.
Then it would be the end!
For the sake of one — of one ——
I hurt my friend.

There should be lamps in the sky,
Not dead moons flickering,
Not mists to cover us.
There should be lamps in the sky.
We tread too heavily
And the darkness is over us.
Sweet Christ, our hearts should be stone!

There should be lamps in the sky
To read the loneliness,
The loneliness we cannot smother
While blindly we stab at one another
With a rage that is a cry.

O that our hearts in one lightning flash
Were illumined thro' and thro'!
Then we should know the oak from the ash,
The rosemary from the rue!
Then would be proved what we dare not prove,
And seen what we dare not see;
Then love would be justified of love,
And a friend a friend would be.

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There are no lamps in the sky;
  There are hearts under all our feet,
And we tread heavily,
  And the circle is complete.
Sweet Christ, our hearts should be stone!
  Then it would be the end.
For the sake of one — of one —
  I hurt my friend.

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"MANY WATERS"

O BRIGHT and terrible Love,
From the depths of your bitter sea,
I turn my eyes to your planet above,
Tender and luminous, O Love —
And its splendour healeth me.
Tender and large you swim into sight,
A Lotus, a lamp of liquid light.
You lean on the sunset and draw the night
As the night draws the sea.
Your tide is bitter, O terrible Love,
In which I sink and drown,
But large and luminous, high above,
Your planet still looks down,
And the bitter waves that go over me
Are bright with your serenity.

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THE BASSARID

DANCE with the Maenad crowd;
Follow your pulses' beat.
Toss back your hair from your forehead proud;
Crush in the madness of cymbals loud
The hyacinths at your feet.

Deep in the dewy dawn,
Where the serpent of passion hisses,
Pan and Sylvan and Satyr and Faun,
Let them whirl you on through the branches torn,
And stain your mouth with kisses.

With parted lips and with eyes
Brimming and drugged and bright,
Cry aloud your wild Thessalian cries,
Cry aloud your Phrygian ecstasies,
In the hot perfumèd night.

Let the wood-spurge cling to your waist,
Let the woodbine tangle your hair.
Let your breast by hazels be embraced
And from oozing green-wood sap be a taste
Of pungent ivy there.

With wild-flung arms and with limbs
Shuddering and wounded lips,
Cry aloud as your brain in frenzy swims,
And loosed by the sweetness of Bacchic hymns,
Your vine-wreathed girdle slips.

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As the torches flicker and fall,
  Flame on through the dew-dark wood;
Answer the thrill of the mad god's call
To the bitter end of the festival
  With every drop of your blood.

Fear not. When back you steal,
  Broken and weary, to me,
With oil and wine I will surely heal
Each bruise and hurt that your senses feel,
  As I take you on my knee.

I will heal each hurt of your outraged soul,
  Each mark of the wood-god's force.
I will cause the eternal sea to roll
With waves more pure than the boreal pole
  Over your least remorse!

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THE CRY

DO you not hear her crying
Out and away and beyond?
Those are the grasses sighing
To the lilies in the pond!
All night long they sigh and talk
As the wind wails up the garden-walk.
They sigh to the lilies in the pond —
But what do they know of away and beyond?

Do you not hear her crying
Out and beyond and afar?
Those are the wild-swans flying
Towards the evening star!
All night long they fly to the west;
And a hundred forests beneath them rest,
And a hundred sunsets behind them are!
But what do they know of beyond and afar?

Out and away and beyond,
I tell you I hear her crying!
Beyond the grass and the pond —
Beyond the wild-swans flying —
Do you think I am mad that I know not
That rise and fall in her cry?
There is no God if I go not
To find her before I die!

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RENEWAL

OVER the heavy hills, over the drowning seas,
The shadows ride;
And the bowed necks of the gods,
Drooping like willow-trees,
Sink side by side.
While over their heads the shadows go,
Drifting, whirling across the sky,
And voices that are not voices flow,
Flow and mingle and lose themselves
In a cry that is no cry.
It must have been in a broken dream
Somewhere else than under our heaven,
That I saw the yellow cowslips gleam
And marigolds to the meadows given.
For while such murder as this is done
And shadows like this ride on the night,
How can the feet of the spring be light?
How can the sap through the branches run?
The natural look of human faces
Is altered. Delicate thoughts are fled.
Torn and gashed in blood-strewn places,
More than the heart can count lie dead.
Bow low your heads, ye gods!
While the troops of the murdered
Rush by you, rush by you on terrible wings.
Bow low your heads, ye gods!
It is not you who will bring us better things.

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We have no hope left, save in her,
  The ancient mother of men,
And the old ineffable stir
  Of life breaking forth again!
  Moss upon ruins,
  Grass upon graves,
  And the fragile leaves of hope
  In the cracks of broken hearts.
For the faint wind-flowers will quiver yet,
  And beneath impenetrable trees,
Will bloom as of old the violet,
  In the ashes of these insanities.

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UNDERSTANDING

HE does not understand
Or know his own heart's truth!"
I heard her say, with a wave of her hand,
And the treacherous hope of youth.

Ah! beautiful one, indeed
He does not; nor ever will
For all the tears that your heart may bleed
And the tears your eyes may fill.

Till the rivers flow back to their source,
Till the grass grow on desert sand,
Till the terrible planets change their course,
He will not understand.

Let him go. But the further he goes
The closer you keep, my dear,
Something he little knows,
Something he cannot hear.
You have touched the eternal sea
And the gods have taken your hand.
When he speaks of the love that used to be,
You will not understand.

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THERE IT IS!

LET it go, then; let it go!
It was that frail thing
You will never, never know,
Winter-time or Spring.
It was only what the sad
Poets used to call
Love, and praise in many a mad
Song and madrigal!

Let it go, then; let it go!
Send your pity after!
For this thing called love is so,
Pity moves its laughter,
Did you whisper the word "friend"?
Send that also packing!
Let the smoke be at an end
When the flame is lacking!

All is well. I blame you not.
You were born to this.
God in heaven! 'Twas I forgot
What a woman is!
Let it go, child, let it go!
I can live without you.
But I cannot bear life so,
Loving you, to doubt you!

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PAX VOBISCUM

OH eyelids of the dying day,
Fall gently on her pain.
And give her peace and take away
The madness from her brain!"

So wept the trees, so sighed the grass,
As that pale form went by;
But the weary evening let her pass,
And the sun sank pitilessly.

"Oh healing ocean of darkness deep,
Your cool nepenthe pour
Over her sorrow; give her sleep!"
Cried the sea to the silent shore.

But the night looked into her white face
And read such things written there
As are written on the gulfs of space —
Emptiness and despair!

And the night was helpless and could not stir;
Then I arose
And watched the waves of nothingness roll,
I who was nothing, nothing to her!

And I took my soul and crucified it,
Crucified it between night and day.
Then at last she knew repose,
And her madness passed away.

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THE LANE

NO one can take away from me
A storm-swept lane I once wandered through,
Overhung with ivy and briony,
And heavy with holly and sombre yew.

The wind in the tree-tops moaned and cried,
And 'mid ancient stalks of faded sedge,
Wild basil drooped, grew pallid, and died;
And dying marjoram filled the hedge.

In long-drawn gusts from the down-land's verge,
The cold rain sobbed disconsolately;
And borne on the wind from the distant surge,
The sound of the sea came lamentably.

Well did I love the rain in my face
And the smell of the leaf-mould and tangled grass,
And the flapping wings that rose from the place,
As flocks of starlings heard me pass.

And again and again, when in crowded squares
The pulse of my life falls low and sinks,
Of the deep-drawn breath of those down-land airs
My parched and harrowed spirit drinks.

And I pray to the gods I may find ere I die
A heart that shall be as that lane to me,
With wild-tossed branches and windy sky
And the sound of the everlasting sea!

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CONDEMNED

DO you want to break my heart
That you say this to me,
With eyes low-lidded and silent lips —
"This is the place of love's eclipse.
Love at this place sinks out of sight,
As, in a tideless, fathomless night,
The lead sinks in the sea."
Do you want to break my heart
That you say this to me?

Do you want to break my heart
That you look thus at me;
Look without speech, look without sign,
Look with eyes that meet not mine;
Look, as if, beyond my face,
You looked thro' empty gulfs of space
Into eternity?
Do you want to break my heart
That you look thus at me?

Do you want to break my heart
That you let your head fall so;
Fall like a flower with petals furled,
Forgetting life, forgetting the world?
Fall on my shoulder and hide it there,
Like a marble thing whose cold despair
Has no more tears to flow.

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Do you want to break my heart
  That you let your head fall so?

Hush! Let us pray together!
  Though we have deeply sinned,
If on the wind stirs a feather,
  If a leaf stirs on the wind,
We are saved. Oh, far apart!
  Nothing, nothing has stirred.
Do you want to break my heart
  That you will not speak one word?

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THE ROSE-LEAVES

AS long as the roots of the green, green grass
Grow cool in the kindly clay,
The rose-leaves of sorrow will fall and pass
And drift on the wind away.

Oh, rose-leaves, rose-leaves of delicate sorrow!
Oh, rose-leaves passionate!
Over the grasses of tomorrow
You drift on the wind of fate.

Lightly, lightly you fall and drift,
Delicate rose-leaves of exquisite pain;
But something is left that no wind can lift,
That returns again, that returns again.

Quivering rose-leaves, lighter than air,
The wind may carry you away;
But your passionate perfume is everywhere,
The pitiless perfume of yesterday.

And tho' the roots of the green, green grass
Grow cool for the feet of tomorrow;
And tho' on the wind they drift and pass,
The delicate rose-leaves of sorrow,

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There are things that stay, there are things that stay,
For the heart to feed upon.
Though today is more than yesterday,
And the grass grows green in the kindly clay,
And the wind has carried the past away,
And the rose-leaves of sorrow have gone.

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THE EXILE

EXILED and alone
I wander over the land,
Since gleaming under the sun
I saw you stand.
In your passionate, childlike way,
You looked at me and the old
Night fled far away.
And the world was blue and gold.
Blue was the sky above me;
Gold was the earth beneath,
When you leapt forth to love me
Like a sword out of its sheath!
Would I had poured them wine,
The high, remorseless powers!
Would I had covered their cruel shrine
With holocausts of flowers!
Then perchance they had held their hand
Ere they turned your heart to stone,
And sent me wandering over the land —
Exiled, alone!

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MORTMAIN

GREY and ghostly cypresses
  Meet above our bed.
That is surely why she presses
  Close to me her head.

Dead are we. Be quite at rest!
  There can be no harm
If across what was her breast
  I should lay my arm.

She was never very brave,
  And these damnèd trees
A most evil whisper have
  In the midnight breeze.

Close she clings with body thin;
  She was always slender;
Do you hold it a deep sin,
  Buried, to be tender?

She is frightened, she would say,
  But her lips have gone —
Curse you! Look the other way.
  Read our burial-stone!

What? She brought me to this pass?
  Brought me to this place?
Oh, it may be! Turn the glass.
  She had a lovely face.

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FIRST AND LAST

DAWN broke over us cool and sweet
So long ago!
The great gods walking in the dew
Made a path for our feet;
Gave roses to me and lilies to you,
And with reeds of the river rare music blew
And made a path for our feet.

But the hours that came with the growing light
Drooped as if they were years,
And in faint flute-music from far away,
The gods, departing, turned to say,
"Nothing can heal the heat of the day
Save night with its rain of tears."

The wind may carry the roses away,
But the human heart can only pray;
Pray to the gods thro' the weary years
For night — for night with its rain of tears.

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PIETY

OH liquid moon that silvers the rims
Of the mountain heights,
Oh lotus-flower that floats and swims
In the island nights.
Oh pale white arms that are stretched to me
With a siren's song,
I answer the spell of your witchery;
I come! I come!

Wait but awhile, oh white, white arms,
Wait but awhile.
I feel your power and I want your charms;
I need your guile.
Let me but plant one red, red rose
On my true Love's tomb,
Then your tide shall bear me wherever it flows.
I come! I come!

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EVASION

HAD I loved the wind in its flight,
Or the storm-cloud darkening the blue.
Had I loved the meteor crossing the night,
I had held it closer than you!

Had I followed the path of the moon
As it quivers on each wave's crest,
I had touched the fount of its light more soon
Than the outermost veil of your breast.

Whirl on, whirl on, on your way!
I can wait, my sun-kissed flower.
At the bitter end of your burning day,
You will hang your head and the gods will say,
"She is his. It is his hour."

No! No! Forgive me, dear heart!
Even then I'll leave you free.
The long pursuit, the cruel smart,
Shall unavenged be.
Till of yourself you lift your lips,
My hour shall dwell in its eclipse.

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THE GODS

LET us leave them all, my dear!
Love, for you, is dead;
Dead and buried far from here,
With the shadows on his bier,
Earth upon his head.

Let us leave them all, my child!
Love, for me, has flown;
Flown and vanished in the wild,
Reconciled, unreconciled,
Turning to his own.

Let us leave them, oh my friend!
Shall not the deep night
With its large and liquid breath,
Like the flowing of calm death,
Heal our memory at the end
And make all things right?

Put the burning fierce unrest
From your brain and from your breast.
Let us kiss the earth and rest.

Ah! perchance if we lie still —
Very still and very quiet
With our pulses' ancient riot
Hushed and silenced by our will,

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There will come thro' the green shadows,
  Thro' the eternal leafy shadows,
Lingering, pausing, watching, dreaming,
  Turning all our pain to seeming;
While the mole of memory delves,
  The immortal gods themselves!

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THE WATER

WHERE the curlew cries all night
I know a lonely water,
Tall reeds grow there and they bow the head
As at the passing of one dead,
Who had been a king's daughter.

And a low faint sobbing goes up from them
Like the voice of the grey, cold rain,
That drifts without pause o'er the marshes dim,
Where the road crosses the plain.

And I gaze with a vacant eye,
On the shadowy weeds that float,
With their arabesques of destiny
Around a fairy boat.

And I start and shudder with fear,
What dead went by this water?
Did my own love drift by me here?
Was it this that filled me with ghastly fear?
Was she that king's dead daughter?

Oh curlew crying again:
Oh reeds that sob in the waters!
They are human tears that make this rain
That darkens the marshes and fills the plain,
Our loves are all kings' daughters!

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THE ROSE

MY heart is burnt in this deadly air,
And the ashes of it are grey,
But the red, red rose you planted there
Blooms in my heart alway.

Out of grey dust and bitter pain,
Its soft red petals blow;
For they are washed by morning rain
And cooled by mountain snow.

You planted that rose and went your way;
And though long, long days you're gone,
Out of the dust of those ashes grey,
Its petals still bloom on.

They are fed by love; and the love they need
My heart can furnish well;
For the heart whose love has tears that bleed
Can make flowers bloom in hell.

They are fed by pain; and pain can draw
Fresh dew from a dried-up spring;
For the pain of love has a secret law;
Can conquer everything.

With that red rose growing in ashes grey,
I can bear what fate may send;
You planted it and went your way —
You are mine now, till the end!

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THE WOOD

COME with me to the mossy places,
Where the rippling amber stream,
Mirroring our shadowy faces,
Leads us on from dream to dream.

Come with me where the leaves are still;
And the wood is hushed like a grassy hill,
A hill of silence, whose fleecy sheep
Are the clouds of sleep — the clouds of sleep!

Heavy and dark are the rain-wet ferns
Drooping over the rocky pool —
See how the steamlet ebbs and turns
Sprinkling the moss with its ripples cool!

Ah! The wisdom of life is here;
As old as I, as young as you;
Thrilling both of us thro' and thro'.
Ah! The wisdom of life is here!

In every plant and in every sod,
The old earth-wisdom here is furled;
Wisdom older than any god,
Wisdom older than the world!

There are whispers here, there are whispers deep,
Hid in these places, that can raise
Memories out of caverns of sleep,
That throw strange meanings upon our days!

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Is it life, is it life, that all these years,
  We've been living, tasting, and calling good?
Ah! Your eyes are full of tears!
  The wood has caught you, the magic wood.

Something breaks down where the wood begins;
  Something breaks down in this hidden spot!
What are our virtues? What are our sins?
  It matters not! It matters not!

Round the boulders the ripples play.
  The dead trunks, lying the stream across,
Catch the sun in a lovelier way
  Than the living plants or the living moss.

Death, what is it? What do we care?
  It is strange. It is magical. It is well.
Give me your hand — tie up your hair —
  If I kissed you, the wood-gods would not tell!

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THE BOOK

I MOVED from the sun-warmed garden-seat,
Where the damask-rose petals covered the ground,
And all the people with quiet feet
Followed the mass-bell's holy sound.

I left the terrace; I wandered away,
Past larkspur and lilies and monk's-hood tall,
To where the lake in its reed-bed lay,
On the sunset-side of the castle wall.

With a thousand years in its human sigh
The vesper murmur came to me
Of the people's patient piety;
Then my heart stopped. What did I see?

I saw her — I saw what the moonlit spell
Summoned by my dark heathen book,
Night by night had brought! Too well
I saw her. Too well I knew her look.

O lost one — lost one — from days long dead,
When love gave all and died when it gave!
O head thrown back! O arms outspread!
O passion stronger than the grave!

When the people returned on quiet feet
From following the mass-bell's holy sound,

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They found me still on that sun-warmed seat,
With the damask-rose petals strewn on the ground.

But they did not know that their voices took
A tone like the wind in a sepulchre;
They did not know that a heathen book
Had made me a monk for evermore!

SUPREME UNCTION

OUT of the eternal night,
Rumours and murmurs infinite,
Come to me where here I sit,
Watching in silence where dead love lies,
Pouring balm upon his closed eyes,
Anointing him with memories.
They are deep, the reservoirs of the night!
They are deep, the wells of the infinite!
And who can say but love may stir
While I pour balm, while I pour myrrh;
And rise like a flame and wander free
Over the land, over the sea,
And in the end come back to me?

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A QUESTION

WHAT do I want of you? You fill
The air about me with delight.
A power stronger than my will
Draws me towards you day and night.
And yet I do not ask to press
Even your hand in a caress.

Your presence vague and nebulous
Moves with me as I cross the street;
Your sweetness like an angelus
Makes holy ground beneath my feet.
In every lovely form I pass
You shape yourself as in a glass.

What do I want of you? I see
Your other lovers pine to drain
The passion of your ecstasy
In kisses desperate as rain,
And yet, although I am not blind,
Not to that harbour steers my mind.

What do I want of you? God knows!
I only know it is too high,
Too rare a venture to disclose,
Save to the vast and starless sky.
Nothing I want, yet when we meet,
I think the world hears my heart beat.

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EUTHANASIA

OUT of a world of pain,
In a trance that may well be death,
I drift on a barge thro' the fields again
Wherein I first drew breath.
And the river cools my face
And the river-scented flowers,
Water-mint and tall loose-strife
Bring me memories deep as life
From all my vanished hours,
And a white wraith-figure of you —
White arms, white hands, white breast —
Drifts by my side, and alone we two
Drink of the river of rest.
And the wind sighs in the reeds —
Gently — a little wind —
And lightly and sadly the gossamer-seeds
Float away o'er the river-meads,
Blown by that little wind,
And cool airs touch our faces
And your wraith-like hollow eyes
Grow soft with the leafy places,
And the low-breathed reedy sighs;
And on and on we drift,
Where the cattle stand in ranks,
And the swallows flit and skim
Over green and mossy banks;
Till the willows droop like ghosts
And the twilight fills the plain

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And the rooks in solemn hosts
  Gather and drift like rain.
Then at last I feel and know
  That all my memories
As they wavered and flickered in endless flow
  Were premonitions sent long ago
Of nothing else than this!
  Than that I with you by my side,
Wraith-like but lovely still,
  Should follow the river and drift and glide,
Past forest and forest — past hill and hill;
  Till the river we follow grows one with the sea.
Ah, the pain again — it will never be!

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A FAREWELL

LIFT not your head before you turn away!
Let not your eyes grow tender, as they grew
Long since — long since! Oh! it is hard to say
How long, so cruel-fast that hour flew!
Go, then, and take away with you the light
Laughter of all the leaves, the pleasant stir
Of all the rain falling on all the flowers;
You cannot take away with you the night!
That you must leave — Love's Holy Sepulchre;
Whereat forlorn hope weeps thro' the dead hours.

Go, then, and take with you the tender mist,
That all these days has floated round the trees,
And gathered in the glens and lightly kissed
The willows quivering in the scarce-felt breeze;
Take it with you and with it take along
The vague sweet thoughts that into it I've poured,
Glimpses and dreams, such as the gods afford,
So rarely, that to earth they scarce belong.
Take them with you! They are far better gone
Than mirrored in my heart, as on a stone.

Go quickly, with no word, if you must go;
Nay, it is only pity in your eyes;
Only sweet pity — and too well I know
How soon that little mist will leave its skies!

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Go quickly — for I would not cling to you
With any desperate ultimate arrest,
And it were hard, if you but raised your hand
Not to lose all my pride upon your breast,
Then, even now, the sea might drown the sand,
Go quickly, oh my friend — adieu! adieu!

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THE GARDEN

WHERE the wet fields stretch away, away,
And travellers never come,
There is the land where my thoughts stray
And the house I call my home.

No house had ever so deep a moat,
Or such tall reeds round it, and no man ever
Heard such lamentable trees
Whispering in the fatal breeze!
Will the keel of that strange boat
Lying under the lilies there,
Lying in weeds like drowned girl's hair,
Ever rise again and float?
Never did the wandering wind
Press its sad invisible face
'Gainst such window-casements blind!
Never did the night-hawk chase
Thro' a sultrier, heavier night
Moths so ghostly in their flight!
Never did the wild swans fly
Over such roofs of mystery!
But do you think it is only of these
Desperate, far-off, piteous, strange,
That I dream, when you see my memory range?
Do you think it is only of these?
No! No! dear heart, if you had seen
That inner garden with crumbling wall,

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That garden where a dying queen
  Might listen all night to a ghost's foot-fall,
If you had seen that old parterre
  Of roses red with forbidden passion
You would know too well why I wander there,
  Too well why my dreams are out of fashion!
Oh, their classic skies are blue and white.
  But grey upon grey is best;
And to follow the rain is my delight
  And the wild swans in their long, long flight
Into the night — into the night —
  To that garden of the West.

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NUNC DIMITTIS

I AM dying; but what of that?
Your hands are under my head,
And your tears are on my cheek
And I am happy at last —
Bitter has been the pain!
Yea I have paid the price
For this last moment with you
But all is well at the end;
Your hands are under my head,
And your tears are on my cheek.
So you love me, after all!
And I bless the eternal dark
Into which I sink and fall
That I've found you — at the last.

MOMENTS

OH, there are moments in our life,
When the dim marshes of the mind,
Those livid swamps, where birds of strife
Beat up against a sullen wind.

Sink, drowned, in one tremendous flood,
Full-brimmed, resistless, like the sea.
I rose and praised God where I stood,
When such a moment came to me!

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NOON

OVER the hills and far away
Are shadowy places where forests deep
Cover with everlasting sleep
Old dethroned gods of an earlier day,
And sometimes when heavy on stone and sod,
The noon-tide heat lies languid and dim,
We feel the passing of such a god,
And the hushed earth yearning to welcome him.

Now — very now — do you feel it? — That breath
Falling, rising, floating, drifting?
What sudden immortal presence is this
That the place and the hour witnesseth?
It rustles the reeds of the meadow rills;
The dreamy July grass it is lifting.
Ah! You are pale. Did something kiss
Your forehead that was sweet as death?
"Look up to the hills" — the psalmist saith —
Our help comes from beyond the hills!

Oh friend, that can be no more than a friend;
As you and others and all decide,
See — the horizon has no end!
See — the doors of the world stand wide!
They are wise, wise, gods, — I know it well —
Wise and strong, that hold us apart;
But this summer-noon has a different spell,
Do you not feel it in your heart?

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From over the hills and far away
  There has come some old forgotten god,
Some old dethroned, unsceptered god,
  Caring nothing for their wise sway,
And has joined us with a nod.

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LOST

THE purple waves recede,
The wings of the sunset sink —
Sea-birds, sea-foam, sea-weed
Are lost on the world's brink,
The flowing darkness covers the deep
And I weep — and I weep!

Oh, desperate memory!
Oh, hopeless, bitter cry!
She is dead who was all my life to me,
And the wind goes heedless by!

Lost! Lost! Lost!
She can never hear me again!
Under the tides of the sea she is tossed
And her tangled hair drifts round her head
And her tender eyelids are closed and dead.
She can never hear me again!

Can it be so?
Can such things be,
As the things that have been between her and me,
And the waters flow on eternally?

Better had neither of us been born!
Oh darkness, darkness, do not stir,
One word, only one word with her
One little word, before the dawn!

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OBSESSION

OH, take away those haunting eyes
That come with the moonlight still,
When the heavy clouds forsake the skies,
And the rain goes over the hill.

Oh, take away what that lovely hand
On the wild sea-margin writ.
Let the wind hide it in the sand
And the sea roll over it!

Oh, lost one, lost one, of whom I dreamed!
On the long white road 'twas you
Who always before me wavered and gleamed,
Who always towards me turned and seemed
The heart's desire come true.

By lonely bridges where ancient floods
Flowed towards lands unknown,
'Twas you, O child of a thousand moods,
Who waited for me alone!

But now, oh now that you've touched me and fled
The long white roads grow cold;
And the water at every bridge's head
Flows darker than of old.

Oh, take away those haunting eyes
That come with the moonlight still.
Let the heavy clouds cover the skies
And the rain cover the hill!

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EXILES

EXILES are we from our very birth,
But strange memorial glimpses come
At cross-roads of this alien earth,
To trouble us with our true home.

A grey tree by a forsaken way,
A forest pool with a shadowy face —
And we breathe deep a moment and say,
"This is the place! This is the place!"

What place? We shall never, never know!
We shall die before our feet have found it.
Yet by its borders all streams flow;
And there's not a wind but blows around it!

It is near, yet far — our natural home,
That an evil magic has hidden aside;
Leaving only tokens of it, that come
To tantalize us and deride.

Exiles are we from our very birth;
And we shall die and be buried far
From that wilder, lovelier, madder earth,
Where the lost gods of our people are!

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MEMORY

OH, let me forget
That ever the air was sweet
With the breath of your flower-like ways,
With your wistful, heart-breaking ways,
And the music of your feet.
Oh, let me forget
That ever the air was warm
With the glow of your youthful lips,
With the rich soft bloom of your lips,
And the magic of your form!

Forget that body so white
And that hair that slipped its bands,
And the eyelids kissed by the perfumed night,
And the pale and passionate hands.

Forget — forget these things!
For these things have an adder's tooth;
And beauty like a scorpion stings,
And cruel — ah, cruel is youth!

Let me feel on my forehead the wind
That blows from the classic shore
Where the wise and lonely shadows find
Rest and need love no more!

No more? If I'm to forget
Your ways, your looks, your tones,

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There must be no flowers by Lethe set,
Or only scentless ones!

Ah, God — the scent of a flower!
All else the flesh can endure.
But for that — in its hour — in its hour —
There is no cure.

NOTHING

WILL my love come to me?
Alas! I have no love.
Though in green and rainy places
The fronds of the ferns uncurl,
And violets lift their faces
To a crescent moon of pearl.

Will my love come to me?
Alas! I have no love.
Far off — somewhere — a shining head —
O sweet Lord Christ who canst raise the dead,
Take my soul and give me my love instead!
Will my love come to me?
Alas! I have no love.

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WHITENESS

WHITE roses set in ivory urns,
White violets wreathed in silver cups;
White marble founts whose moss and ferns,
The shadow of the moon drink up.

Since I have known you and your ways,
Things such as these are my delights.
A whiteness glimmers on my days,
A whiteness hovers o'er my nights.

White dews, white crescent moons, white dawns,
White flickering feet, white-gleaming hands,
White limbs that dream on twilight lawns,
White limbs that dance on shimmering sands.

O child, O maiden-acolyte,
Whose censer breathes such silvery breath,
Pour wine white as the flesh of Christ
Upon the altar of white death!

Then all red things shall fade away —
Red flame, red roses, and red blood,
And we shall voyage night and day
The white sea of the tears of God.

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SILENCE

MY dear, that crying in the heart,
When the summer's done,
Hide it away, hide it apart,
That none can hear it, none!
If the wind and the owl and the cold raindrops
Heard that crying that never stops,
The crying of the daughters of men,
They too would be silent — and what then?

All would be silent then again!
Silent the bird of woe —
Silent the wind — silent the strain
Of the rain-drops dropping slow.
All would be silent and with one sigh
A silent world would float on the sky.
Worlds such as these, made of silent tears,
They call the music of the spheres!

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FINIS

So it ends, my dream of loving!
In this empty house I sit,
With my tired spirit proving
All the cynics' bitter wit.
Round me thro' the open shutters
Floats the heavy-scented night;
Not a leaf or grass-blade flutters;
Vapours hide the moon from sight.

Endless, boundless, high above me,
Yawn the ghastly gulfs of space.
I'd have looked, with her to love me,
Those abysses in the face!
All illusion! Well, what matter?
Dim the lights — applaud the play!
Fill the silence with our chatter.
Lay the fairy masks away.

Oh, deep night! My invocation
Is to you, to you alone!
Pour, pour down your consecration,
Though the dream of love has flown.
Large-enfolding night, receive me!
Drown the treacherous siren-songs.
Ah! the love that will not leave me,
Night, to you alone belongs.

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THE GRAVE

"WHAT are you thinking when so you look,
Holding my hand with cold, cold fingers,
As we watch this babbling summer brook
Where the virginal flush of spring still lingers?"

"Your eyes are vacant. They stare and stare.
They seem not to see these blossoms white
That drink the sun and perfume the air.
They stare like a dead man's into the night."

"I think of a white road crossing a hill,
And a ruined church where no man passes,
And a tombstone lying hushed and still
And a north wind whispering thro' the grasses."

"Is my body not warm to your touch,
That you hold me so quietly on your knees?
Look how the sunlight falls thro' the trees!
Is love dead so soon? Is it always such?"

"The white road crosses the barren hill;
No blossoms are there, no bodies warm;
Only a tombstone, very still,
And one beneath it, a shrouded form."

"Had she lips that were warm like mine?
When I am dead a thousand lovers
Will kiss the earth my body covers;
And the splendid sun on my dust will shine.

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"Far, you say, is that ruined place?
No man walks on that lonely road?
Was it so beautiful, then, that face
That is mingled now with the heavy mould?"

"No! No! Not beautiful at all!
Withered and wasted — what you will!
And the north wind blows thro' that ruined wall,
And no man ever crosses that hill!

"Yes, your thousand lovers will come.
I believe it! And till the sea
Drown in its flood her grassy tomb
She will unremembered be!"

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THE RETURN

WHAT can I give to you
Who have given me everything?
Can I rob the sky of its blue?
Can I take the green from the spring?
Can I catch the dew as it falls?
Can I reach the fount of the rain?
Can I snare the foam of the waterfalls
And their rain-bow mist retain?
Can I enter the tombs of kings
And their cerements unbind?
Can I steal the Tetrarch's rings
And Salome's pearls unwind?
Will Helen of Troy give up
The bracelets from her wrist;
Or Iseult restore the cup
That Tristram drained and kissed?
They are gone — they are gone, all these —
And their names, like a small faint rain,
Drift by without surcease
Across time's grievous plain.
Oh, lonely and classic face,
My harbour and heathen heaven,
Can I find nothing to replace
All that to me you've given?
Let these dim shades depart
And their sad faint ghosts go hence.
Out of my heart — my heart —
I will give you your recompense!

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THE SHIP

I MADE a ship of my cruelty,
A wonderful, terrible ship,
With masts of silver and ebony,
And bulwarks of carven ivory,
And a figure-head of chalcedony,
And a prow like a lion's lip.

And I sat in the stern of my ship,
Alone, be it said and known,
You are always alone in that kind of ship,
Put your finger upon your lip!
Christ's mother, how deep alone!

And in my ship I sailed;
And the waters were purple and green;
And all day long the sea-gulls wailed
And the sun went down and the waters paled
And a phantom-moon was seen.

And under the moon I still sailed on;
But not only the moon was there!
Algol, the Demon's Eye, looked down —
Algol, the Eye of the Demon, shone,
Thro' the chill and frozen air.

Oh ship, my ship, called Cruelty!
Is it forgotten then of thee

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How we came in the hour of dawn
To a land where silence covered the sea,
To a harbour of virginal mystery
And a little pier forlorn?

For the people fled away
When they saw my terrible ship,
Livid, phantom-like and grey,
Led by Algol, at break of day,
Into that harbour slip!

But one fled not. One stood
On the edge of the little pier,
A boy — a boy in his solitude!
A girl — a girl in her fear!

No boy — no girl; a god, a god!
And I hoisted the sails of my ship;
And Cruelty, with Love on board,
— Your finger on your lip!
Went sailing, sailing over the sea
Till the sun grew like the moon;
Till the moon — oh, mother of mystery!
Till the moon grew like the sun.

And Algol, the Demon's Eye, looked down
Upon that curious ship;
Algol, the Eye of the Demon, shone —
Your finger on your lip!
But Love and I played a deeper game
Than any Demons know,

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And my ship, my ship without a name,
  On the purple sea a silver flame,
From Earth to Heaven did go.

O Prince! make of your cruelty
  A ship and not a sword.
Give it masts of silver and ebony!
  Give it bulwarks of carven ivory,
And a figure-head of chalcedony;
  And take on board a god!

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